



Representative Marcia L. Fudge  
LBJ War on Poverty Floor Speech As Delivered  
Date: January 9, 2014

Mr. Speaker, today I rise to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty.

In 1964, President Johnson stood in this Chamber and addressed a Congress that represented a nation where more than 25 percent of Americans lived in poverty. In his address, President Johnson launched an agenda that led to the creation of Medicare, Medicaid, Jobs Corp, Head Start and nutrition assistance for those who struggle to put food on their table.

His war and its resulting programs helped move millions out of poverty. From 1967 to 2012, the poverty rate fell from 26 percent to 16 percent largely because of the strong safety net programs initiated by President Johnson's agenda. Yet, here we are today, 50 years later, and too many Americans are still living on the "outskirts of hope" because the War on Poverty has now become a "War on the Poor."

In the last year alone, Congress has agreed to indiscriminate across the board cuts known as sequestration in an effort to

balance the budget, and the House passed a Farm Bill that cut SNAP by 40 billion dollars. Sequestration hurts the very people who need help the most by greatly reducing critical funding to programs like WIC and Head Start.

Congress drastically cut one of the most powerful anti-poverty programs — SNAP, better known as food stamps. That is absurd when, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, SNAP kept 4.9 million Americans out of poverty in 2012 alone, including 2.2 million children.

Congress has also chosen not to extend unemployment insurance. Even though our country continues to lift itself out of the recession, many Americans still need our support. Turning your back on the 1.4 million Americans who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own is unconscionable.

In an interview yesterday, I was asked to respond to a quote regarding unemployment insurance by a Republican and this is what he said, “we have to introduce the blessing of work to people who have never seen it.” And let me just say to be clear, he could not possibly have been talking about unemployment insurance because you had to have worked to

even receive it— so he obviously doesn't know what unemployment insurance is. And to my colleague, I say that the American people know they should be blessed with work, but they need meaningful work with a living wage.

I will continue to be a voice for the poor and will always fight on behalf of the forty-six million Americans trying to survive in households with inadequate incomes. Americans need us to open the gates of opportunity—so they can eat properly, get a quality education, and find good paying jobs.

So on this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I am making it clear that the War on Poverty might be over but the fight for the poor is not.

We must reinforce the plans of President Johnson that would ensure all Americans can support themselves and their families, and have better chances to contribute to our economy and our society. This is the way we build upon the progress we made over the past five decades, not by taking action to reverse it.

To paraphrase Dr. King, he said we have an obligation to “those who have been left out of the sunlight of opportunity.” I yield back Mr. Speaker.